

WHY REMOVAL OF SUDAN OFF SST IS LONG OVERDUE ?

***"HERE! READ SUDAN'S REC-
ORD!" (1)***

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The meeting that gathered Sudanese Foreign Minister Dr. Dirdiri Mohammed Ahmed, with the US Deputy Secretary of State John Sullivan, on the sidelines of his participation in the work of the 73rd session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, which began on 25th of September, could be regarded as the official kickoff of the second phase of the Constructive Engagement between the two countries.

In the footsteps of the previous five-track engagement that led the revocation to the economic embargo on Sudan, The two sides are now poised to engage extensively in a dialogue defined by a specific time and thematic framework, which should presumably pave the way for lifting the name of Sudan from the list of state sponsors of terrorism SST, normalization of bilateral relations and upgrading the level of the bilateral diplomatic representation to the level of ambassadors.

To that very end, and during Dr. Dirdiri's meeting with the US Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Nicky Healy, the latter expressed her administration's readiness to move forward in dialogue and positive engagement with Sudan, taking into account Sudan's great efforts to bring peace to the State of South Sudan and other countries of the region.

As a matter of fact, Washington has been issuing recently positive reports on Sudan in, particularly the latest periodic report of the US State Department on the state of terrorism in the world, which has borne a number of positive signals regarding Sudan. These were encouraging signals for Sudanese diplomacy to further engage in constructive talks with its American counterpart, with the ultimate goal of removing the Sudan off SST, taking stock of the changes in US foreign policy, which would help establish a new phase in relations between Khartoum and Washington.

It will not be a deviation from the truth to claim that President Trump's administration has dealt with the Sudan file differently vis a vis the previous U.S administrations; besides lifting two decades of trade embargo, Washington has kept on sending positive signals which include inter alia; exempting Sudan from the Temporary Protection Act

and other US measures including the prevention of the entry of the United States to citizens of a number of African countries. These indications tell in a way or another that removing Sudan's name off SST should be somewhat around the corner, taking into account that such legitimate and in fact long overdue right has been duly reinforced by the mounting regional and global pleas to that very end.

As these words are inked, another historic and a landmark visit to Washington is currently underway; the Sudanese Joint Chiefs of Staff, Lieutenant General Kamal Abdul Marouf, to participate in an anti-terrorism conference (arguably the first kind on this level for more than 30 years). General Abdul Marouf held series of meetings with his counterparts at the Pentagon, deliberating issues of common concern and interest.

On his part, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for African Affairs Alan Patterson, commended the roles played by Khartoum in its African environment, its coordination with its neighboring countries in the region, and its contributions to the peace-making, security and stability, as well as Sudan's efforts in combating transnational Crimes, human trafficking in human beings and illegal immigration.

Indeed, the military relations between the two countries have witnessed steady development, which include inter alia; exchanging the opening of military attaches in Khartoum and Washington, inviting representatives of the Sudanese army to participate in AFRICOM meetings in Germany in 2017, besides inviting Sudan to take part in the joint US- Egyptian military training exercise 'Operation Bright Star' in Egypt, which is essentially meant to enhance the ability of American forces (and its allies) in the Middle East in the event of war.

As a matter of fact, notwithstanding all negative stereotyping here and there, the truth remains that Sudan is and has always been at the forefront of nations combating scourge of terrorism. Sudan has always upheld the understanding that terrorism has no identity and no religion, thereby needs to be rejected and denounced strongly in all its forms and manifestations. Likewise, Sudan strongly believes that terrorists are committing these acts, out of their deviant ideologies and evil thought. In fact, Sudan has longstanding record in combating terrorism in its region and beyond.

Moreover, and by the same token, Sudan was indeed a pioneer and since 1998, in drawing the attention to not only the importance of reaching a common understanding and a consensus on the definition of terrorism, but equally on the importance of the collective and global work to address the problem of terrorism, even before many other countries were actually alarmed by the said phenomenon.

Following words with action, Khartoum on August 2016, in collaboration with the Arab League, hosted yet another important workshop on the role of religious discourse in the face of terrorism. The choice of Khartoum as a venue is not for that workshop was

anything but accidental; It was a recognition of Sudan's pioneering and exemplary experience in handling cases of those involved in violence or facing the imminent danger of radicalization. One of the most important recommendations of the said forum has been, the need revise school syllabuses to ensure that a message of religious tolerance and understanding is ingrained, retraining of imams and religious community leaders and enlisting them in spreading enlightened interpretations of texts and resorting to debate with those suspected of radicalization.

Let's be reminded that think tank advocacy groups in the America, continued to argue for a rethink of the sanctions, as well as for a removal of Sudan from the State Sponsors of Terror (SST) list. The Atlantic Council's Sudan Task Force for instance maintains that in one of its recent reports maintains that "Continuing to maintain the SST designation without any evidence of sponsoring terrorism – and, in fact, with plentiful evidence of Sudan's cooperation in countering terrorism as well as various commendations from members of the intelligence and diplomatic communities – undermines US credibility and leverage in Sudan, the region, and on wider US counterterrorism efforts"

Yet the most revealing and landmark testimony for Sudan was made before the Congress in 2009, where General J. Scott Gration, the US's former Presidential Envoy to Sudan, urged his government to remove Sudan off SST, making it unequivocal; not only that there were "no evidence" supporting Sudan's inclusion in the said list, he on the contrary, remind the Congress by then, that CIA itself, has been referring to Sudan's strong record on counterterrorism cooperation as having "saved American lives". Likewise Sudan's crucial help in combating terrorism was similarly described by the Bush administration's Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage as "really terrific."

In a sarcastic tone, J. Peter Pham is Director of the Atlantic Council's Africa Center, in his article "Sudan still sponsor of terrorism? " presents a strong argument refuting the very reasoning for the continuation of the name of Sudan in the list of countries sponsoring terrorism. Mr. Pham concludes "While US-Sudanese relations have often been difficult in the more than twenty years since the African country was first designated a "state sponsor of terrorism," it is hard nowadays to convincingly argue that the reasons that motivated that declaration still hold. In fact, last year's State Department terrorism report even commended Khartoum's cooperation against terrorist financing in some detail"

Another strong argument was made in the article 'Why Trump should consider removing Sudan from the terrorism list' published in New York Times on September 25, 2018, by David Hoile; the director of the Africa Research Center. Mr. David Hoile says "there was never any evidence to justify Khartoum being placed in 1993 on the list of countries determined to have repeatedly provided support for acts of international terrorism.

David Hoile further says that “The Clinton administration’s political abuse of federal anti-terrorism legislation by rejecting repeated Sudanese offers of counter-terrorism cooperation and intelligence-sharing by then on al Qaeda terrorist organization before it metastasized. Mr. Hoile goes on to conclude that had the Carter administration accepted the Sudanese offers, a chain of horrible events stretching up to this day atrocities, such as of 9/11 and beyond, could have simply been prevented.

Europe on the other hand, does not hold an opposing opinion if not far advanced from the US position; in her meeting the former foreign minister of the Sudan Prof. Ghandour in April 2017, the Bulgaria's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ekaterina Zaharieva, (Bulgaria held the former EU presidency) has described the Sudan as one of the best partners for the EU in combating terrorism, violent fundamentalism, illegal migration and human trafficking. The Bulgarian FM went on to describe Sudan as an anchor of stability in a region of no stability.